

SELF-BLAME IN CICERO'S *FIRST CATILINARIAN ORATION*

By

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Abstract

Cicero's oratorical style is not known for being retiring and modest. His usually boastful nature makes it startling that he engages in self-criticism on several occasions in the *First Catilinarian Oration*. On further investigation, however, it is possible to see how Cicero uses this self-blame in several ways to maintain the appearance of control over Catiline's conspiracy while avoiding any possible accusation of excessive self-praise or arrogance. Cicero is able to take self-blame and use it to portray himself as a troubled *novus homo*, in this case, the first in his family to serve as consul, struggling to manage a crisis. He then redirects this self-blame into praise and presents himself as far exceeding the character of the *novus homo* he initially created. Self-blame allows Cicero another method of manipulating the ideal image of himself he hopes to project throughout the *First Catilinarian*.

Self-Blame in Cicero's *First Catilinarian Oration*

The many aspects of Cicero's style did not lack for attention in ancient scholarship. It is uncommon, then, to undertake a study of a figure used by Cicero with minimal guidance from the ancient rhetorical texts. One figure Cicero uses multiple times in the *First Catilinarian* has largely escaped the notice of ancient scholarship on rhetoric; this figure is self-blame. It is surprising that Cicero's use of self-blame in this speech has been overlooked for so long, since the apparent humility and self-criticism is striking when compared to Cicero's usual boldness.

Cicero's overall demeanor in his speeches can best be characterized as unashamedly self-confident. Quintilian marvels at the force of Cicero's oratory saying "Now in all that he says there is such authority, that you would be ashamed to disagree."¹ It is hard to reconcile this sort of authoritative figure with the self-criticism found in the *First Catilinarian*. Plutarch speaks about Cicero's style in a less complimentary fashion, in his reference to Cicero's self praise: "But he fills up his books and writings with praises of himself, and he made his oratory which was sweet and had the greatest charm burdensome and wearisome to his hearers, since this unpleasantness was always by him like death."² This is not an accusation that can be leveled against a man known to be retiring and modest. Cicero strives, and generally succeeds, in presenting himself in his oratory as a grand and noble figure to whom the republic and all who live in it are forever indebted. In his letters, this theme is often mentioned. To Pompey, he said:

¹ Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.111: *iam in omnibus quae dicit tanta auctoritas inest, ut dissentire pudeat*. This and all subsequent translations from Latin and Greek are mine.

² Plut. *Cic.* 24.3: ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ βιβλία τελευτῶν κατέπλησε καὶ τὰ συγγράμματα τῶν ἐγκωμίων καὶ τὸν λόγον ἡδιστον ὄντα καὶ χάριν ἔχοντα πλείστην ἐπαχθῆ καὶ φορτικὸν ἐποίησε τοῖς ἀκροωμένοις, ὥσπερ τινὸς ἀεὶ κηρὸς αὐτῷ τῆς ἀηδίας ταύτης προσούσης.

“I expected congratulations of some sort in your letter on behalf of the republic and our relationship, which I think you overlooked out of fear, so as not to offend anyone. But know that, what I have done on behalf of the republic, is approved by the judgment and testimony of the entire world.”³ Similarly, in his request to Lucceius for a history to be written of his life, he wrote: “This desire of mine for speed, as I wrote in the beginning, is because I am eager in mind, so that others should learn from your book while I am living, and that I should enjoy my small glory while I am alive.”⁴ Given the extent to which Cicero cultivated this image of control and authority in his oratory, it is startling when he deviates from it as he does in the *First Catilinarian* when he acknowledges that the manner in which he has handled the Catilinarian conspiracy might be lacking in some way. As it would be out of character for Cicero to change how he presents himself without good reason, I must consider how Cicero, normally devoted to building his own image through praise, can use self-blame without compromising the character of authority he has worked to build. This paper will examine how Cicero uses self-blame to balance the need to preserve the appearance of authority while maintaining an acceptable level of modesty.

CICERO’S APPROACH TO THE *FIRST CATILINARIAN*

The question of what Cicero was trying to accomplish in the *First Catilinarian* is complex. The speech in its entirety does not clearly fit into any one of the usual categories of oratory. Parts of the speech are obviously epideictic, other sections are closer to deliberative oratory, some seem to conform more to the standards of a forensic speech, and a few sections

³ Cic. *Fam.* 5.6 *quarum aliquam in tuis litteris et nostrae necessitudinis et rei publicae causa gratulationem exspectavi, quam ego abs te praetermissam esse arbitror, quod vererere, ne cuius animum offenderes; sed scito ea, quae nos pro salute patriae gessimus, orbis terrae iudicio ac testimonio comprobari.*

⁴ Cic. *Fam.* 5.12.

cannot be classified as any of these types. In many ways however, the *First Catilinarian* as a whole can be read as Cicero's assertion of his competency as a consul. Cicero is attempting, as Batstone indicates, "a performance that dramatized the crisis while assuring the Senate that he had everything under control. He needed to construct an image of his passion and his concern, of his selflessness and his providence."⁵ The image Cicero constructs of himself is central both to the success of the speech and to his ability to manage the conspiracy in the way he thought best.

Cicero must strike a delicate balance in the *First Catilinarian*. To achieve his goals in managing the Catilinarian conspiracy, Cicero must reconcile his efforts to have the conspirators executed or exiled with the views of many in the senate who believed that these actions were outside the range of powers permitted by the *senatus consultum ultimum*. He must also balance the need not to appear hasty or impulsive in his handling of the conspiracy with the necessity of not seeming overly lenient or ineffective. These balances are complicated further by Cicero's status as a *novus homo*, a status that was exploited by his opposition both during the consular elections and in Catiline's response to the *First Catilinarian* oration.

Cicero uses self-criticism as one method of managing these delicate balances in the *First Catilinarian*. Self-criticism appears in three places in the speech, early in the speech in two small related sections where Cicero appears to be criticizing his lack of decisive action against the conspiracy. In the first of the two small sections, Cicero criticizes himself in his consular role and lessens the impact of the blame by also including his colleague Antonius, "We have a senate decree against you, Catiline, severe and serious, it is not the action of the republic that is lacking, nor the authority of this body: we, the consuls, I say openly, we have failed".⁶ Later, in 1.4,

⁵ Batstone 1994:218.

⁶ Cic. *Cat.* 1.3: *habemus senatus consultum in te, Catilina; vehemens et grave, non deest rei publicae consilium neque auctoritas huius ordinis: nos, nos, dico aperte, consules desumus.*

Cicero criticizes himself again, this time as an individual, for the same perceived fault, though this time in more detail, stating “I desire, senators, to be merciful, I desire in such danger of the republic not to seem negligent, but now I condemn myself for inactivity and idleness.”⁷ The final statement of self-criticism differs greatly from the first two, both because it is much longer and because it is not direct. Cicero filters the self-criticism in this section through the voice of the *Patria* in a lengthy discussion of Cicero’s actions or lack of action in his handling of the Catilinarian conspiracy to this point, and of Cicero’s responsibilities to the republic as a man who has, in a way, been raised by the republic. The *Patria* sarcastically criticizes him saying, “Indeed you give great thanks to the Roman people who raised you, a man known only through yourself, without the recommendation of ancestors, ... if because of a fear of hatred or some other danger you neglect the safety of your fellow citizens.”⁸

This paper will examine Cicero’s three uses of self-criticism in the *First Catilinarian* in both its direct and indirect forms. In the direct forms I will examine self-criticism as a rhetorical device. It is used to lay the groundwork for an argument that will eventually justify the behavior being criticized while also avoiding any accusation of excessive arrogance without jeopardizing the appearance that Cicero was responding effectively to the conspiracy. This paper will also show how Cicero uses indirect self-criticism through the *prosopopoeia* of the *Patria*. The criticism used in the *prosopopoeia* has two primary purposes in the speech, the first use is to rouse the emotions of the audience, a typical use for *prosopopoeia*. Secondly, the technique allows Cicero to substitute the *Patria* for the prominent ancestors he lacks, but who would generally be invoked to criticize someone in *prosopopoeia*.

⁷ Cic. Cat. 1.4: *cupio, patres conscripti, me esse clementem, cupio in tantis rei publicae periculis non dissolutum videri, sed iam me ipse inertiae nequitiaeque condemno.*

⁸ Cic. Cat. 1.28: *praeclaram vero populo Romano refers gratiam qui te, hominem per te cognitum, nulla commendatione maiorum ...extulit...si propter invidiam aut alicuius periculi metum salutem civium tuorum neglegis.*

When discussing the Catilinarian Orations, especially the first, the question often arises whether the orations were altered before publication and, if so, to what extent. Riggsby notes that despite the arguments made suggesting that Cicero made substantial revisions and additions to his speeches prior to publication, the evidence more strongly indicates that most of the changes were “small-scale stylistic polishing and occasional brief additions.”⁹ Even if some of the passages in the *First Catilinarian* were added for publication in an attempt to mitigate rising criticism over his handling of the conspiracy, as Kennedy argues,¹⁰ it would be a surprising tactic for Cicero to add a criticism of himself into a justification of his behavior when attempting to deflect criticism.

PRAISE AND BLAME

In invective oratory, certain topics were considered to be most suited for praise and blame. Cicero identifies the general categories of things appropriate to praise as the person’s ancestry, education, and character, any important happenings in their lives, their opinions, and their actions.¹¹ Following from this, the vices most suited for blame are the opposites of each virtue.¹² Certain aspects of these topics of blame were commonly used in Cicero’s invectives. Despite the difficulty of classifying the *First Catilinarian* as a purely epideictic speech, the sections of the speech in which Cicero attacks Catiline can be considered invective by their nature. Craig, in his paper “Audience Expectations, Invective, and Proof” categorizes the topics of blame Cicero most commonly uses and identifies them as topics expected by the audience.¹³ Cicero does not use all of these possible topics of blame in the *First Catilinarian*. In particular,

⁹ Riggsby 1999:184.

¹⁰ Kennedy 1994:135.

¹¹ Cic. *Part.* 82.

¹² Cic. *Part.* 81.

¹³ Craig 2004:202.

he cannot use the first topic that Craig lists, embarrassing family origin, in the Catilinarians, due to the controversy surrounding his own status as a *novus homo* and the risk that any blame he may cast against Catiline's family origins could later be turned against him and his lack of prominent ancestors.

Throughout the course of the speech, however, Cicero touches at least briefly on 6 of the 17 topics in Craig's catalog: the plunder of public or private property (*nunc iam aperte rem publicam universam petis, templa deorum immortalium, tecta urbis, vitam omnium civium, Italiam totam ad exitium et vastitatem vocas.*)¹⁴; aspiring to *regnum* or tyranny (*dixi ego idem in senatu caedem te optimatum contulisse in ante diem V Kalendas Novembris*)¹⁵; hostility towards family (*quid vero? nuper cum morte superioris uxoris novis nuptiis locum vacuefecisses, nonne etiam alio incredibili scelere hoc scelus cumulavisti?*)¹⁶; financial embarrassment (*praetermitto ruinas fortunarum tuarum quas omnis proximis Idibus tibi impendere senties*)¹⁷; gluttony and drunkenness (*hic tu qua laetitia perfruere, quibus gaudiis exsultabis, quanta in voluptate bacchabere, cum in tanto numero tuorum neque audies virum bonum quemquam neque videbis!*)¹⁸; and unacceptable sexual conduct (*ad huius vitae studium meditati illi sunt qui feruntur labores tui, iacere humi non solum ad obsidendum stuprum verum etiam ad facinus obeundum.*)¹⁹ In addition to these general categories of praise and blame, Cicero identifies one specific category of praiseworthy behaviors that are particularly pleasant to hear in epideictic speeches. These virtues are particularly enjoyable to the audience of epideictic speeches because they are traits that benefit the community as a whole more than they benefit the person

¹⁴ Cic. *Cat.* 1.12.

¹⁵ Cic. *Cat.* 1.7.

¹⁶ Cic. *Cat.* 1.14.

¹⁷ Cic. *Cat.* 1.14.

¹⁸ Cic. *Cat.* 1.26.

¹⁹ Cic. *Cat.* 1.26.

possessing the virtue. Cicero, in his discussion of praiseworthy traits in the *De Oratore*, identifies these most pleasant virtues.

Virtue however, which is praiseworthy in itself and without which nothing can be praised, nevertheless has several parts, of which some are more suitable for praise than the others. For there are some virtues which are seen in the habits of men and depict a certain kindness and generosity, others which are in some inborn facility or greatness and strength of mind; for mercy, justice, kindness, honesty, bravery in common dangers are pleasant to hear in commendations, for all these virtues are not thought to be fruitful so much for those who have them as for the race of men.²⁰

Following the theme from the above passage that vice is the opposite of virtue, the opposites of these praiseworthy traits are particularly suited for blame because they are self-serving.

Blame itself can serve a variety of purposes in the epideictic speech. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* identifies three reasons why a speaker might use blame in an epideictic speech: first, that the blame is justified due to the mistreatment the speaker has suffered; second, that the speaker thinks it is useful to show wickedness and vice without equal; and finally, to show what behavior is pleasing by censuring bad behavior.²¹ Cicero uses the first and third justifications in his invective against Catiline, he will later use the second in his own self-accusation. Using the first justification, he comments several times on the mistreatment he has personally received from Catiline, both recent (You established that you would now leave the city, you said now there was this small delay, because I lived. Two Roman knights were found who could free you

²⁰ Cic. *De Orat* 2.343: *Virtus autem, quae est per se ipsa laudabilis et sine qua nihil laudari potest, tamen habet pluris partis, quarum alia est ad laudationem aptior; sunt enim aliae virtutes, quae videntur in moribus hominum et quadam comitate ac beneficentia positae; aliae, quae in ingeni aliqua facultate aut animi magnitudine ac robore; nam clementia, iustitia, benignitas, fides, fortitudo in periculis communibus iucunda est auditu in laudationibus; omnes enim hae virtutes non tam ipsis, qui eas habent, quam generi hominum fructuosae putantur.*

²¹ *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.11.

from this care, and that very night a little before day they would kill me in my bed.)²² and after the consular elections (As long as you plotted against me as the consul elect, I defended myself not with a public guard but by private diligence.)²³ The third category is seen when he uses the voice of the *Patria* to establish Catiline as the cause of all wickedness saying “For a number of years now no crime has existed except through you.”²⁴

Once a reason for blame has been established, the orator can employ blame in several ways in an epideictic speech. One major use of blame is to influence the emotions of the audience and, without employing argumentation, to strengthen statements that are certain or that the orator wishes to have considered as certain. Cicero describes this use in his *De Partitione Oratoria*.

This kind of speaking, however, is composed of narrating and explaining deeds without any argumentation, it is moving to the mind, drawing it gently in a more suitable manner than establishing or confirming truth. For it does not confirm doubtful things, but augments that which is certain or is depicted as certain.²⁵

The second major use for blame in epideictic speech is to influence opinions against the character of the opponent and in favor of the orator. Cicero includes this use in his discussion of the best ways of winning the favor of the audience. “Therefore it is very influential for winning to get approval of the values, character, deeds and life of those who plead cases and of those for

²² Cic. *Cat.* 1.9-10

²³ Cic. *Cat.* 1.11

²⁴ Cic. *Cat.* 1.18

²⁵ Cic. *De Part.* 71: *conficitur autem genus hoc dictionis narrandis exponendisque factis sine ullis argumentationibus, ad animi motus leniter tractandos magis quam ad fidem faciendam aut confirmandam accommodare. Non enim dubia firmantur sed ea quae certa aut pro certis posita sunt augentur.*

whom they plead, and likewise to get condemnation of the corresponding traits of the opponent.”²⁶

Not unlike blame, the use of self-praise is also constrained by both rhetorical theory and the necessities of the particular oration. The Roman rhetorical tradition tolerated, and even expected and encouraged, a certain amount of self-praise from the senators and noble classes. The use of self-praise was necessary for the noble Roman to maintain his *dignitas*.²⁷ Cicero is no exception to this tradition of self-praise. He did not hesitate to praise himself throughout his speeches, though his range of acceptable topics for self-praise was limited by his status as a *novus homo* and his corresponding inability to praise his ancestors. However, this tradition of self-praise often required the praise to be prefaced by a sort of false modesty in the form of an apology. Allen, speaking about the tradition of apologizing before self-praise and Cicero’s occasional disregard for the convention, notes that “since Cicero was aware of this standard of conduct, he must have had reasons for not following it upon occasion, and those reasons must have seemed adequate to his contemporaries.”²⁸ Cicero’s many instances of self-praise in the *First Catilinarian* represent a clear example of this break with tradition.

The use of self-praise was not without risk, as using it to excess could be interpreted as arrogance. It was important for Cicero to maintain this essential balance, as too little self-praise could compromise his *dignitas*, but too much would be considered excessive. It was critical for Cicero to avoid this excess because the appearance of the character of the orator can hold central importance to the success of the speech. In fact, Cicero comments in the *De Oratore* that the character of the orator can carry more weight in persuasion than even the facts of the case.

²⁶ Cic. *De Orat.* 2.182: *Valet igitur multum ad vincendum probari mores et instituta et facta et vitam eorum, qui agent causas, et eorum, pro quibus, et item improbari adversariorum.*

²⁷ Allen 1954:124.

²⁸ Allen 1954:127.

Therefore portraying their characters in the speech as just, vigorous, devout, modest, enduring injustice, is something very strong; and this either in the beginning, in the narrative, or in the conclusion has such power, if it is treated pleasantly and with feeling, that often it is more influential than the case itself.²⁹

It is critical, then, for Cicero to maintain the appearance of his character within acceptable limits, and it seems unlikely that he would run the risk of violating these limits. As Allen points out, “a successful orator, which Cicero certainly was, would regard it as lunacy to say anything which would tend to alienate the sympathies of the jury or of the audience.”³⁰ However, given his break with the tradition of apologizing for self-praise in the *First Catilinarian*, he must use alternate methods for dissipating any perception of arrogance that his praise may have caused.

Self-praise in excess must be avoided for another reason as well, because even though it may be acceptable and appropriate within limits, any rhetorical figure used to excess has the potential to evoke disgust from the audience. Cicero compares excess in oratory to excesses in cooking and poetry; too much sweetness in food or too much pleasantness in poetry becomes offensive after a while. Likewise any good oratory can easily border on the distasteful if it is excessive. “In writing and in speaking the vice of over-coloring is recognized not only by the judgment of the ears but also by the judgment of the mind.”³¹ Quintilian discusses the issue of boastfulness in oratory generally, but particularly boasting about one’s skills in oratory. He states that excess in self-praise offends the pride of the orator’s hearers. “But he who extols

²⁹Cic. *De Orat.* 2.184: *Horum igitur exprimere mores oratione, iustos, integros, religiosos, timidos, perferentes iniuriarum, mirum quiddam valet; et hoc vel in principiis vel in re narranda vel in peroranda tantam habet vim, si est suaviter et cum sensu tractatum, ut saepe plus quam causa valeat.*

³⁰ Allen 1954:128.

³¹ Cic. *De Orat.* 3.100: *in scriptis et in dictis non aurium solum sed animi iudicio etiam magis infucata vitia noscuntur.*

himself beyond limit will be thought to oppress and disdain himself and not so much to make himself greater as to make others lesser.”³²

The orator has one primary tool at his disposal to avoid the accusation of excessive self-praise or arrogance, and that is to give the appearance of modesty. Cicero identifies the appearance of modesty as something that is necessary for even the most eloquent orators to use to avoid being seen as shameless. “It seems to me, those who speak the best, who are able to speak most easily and eloquently, nevertheless, unless they approach speaking with caution, and are troubled in the beginning of the speech, they almost seem to be shameless.”³³ Cicero especially must avoid appearing too bold as accusations of arrogance were sometimes brought against him due to his frequent use of self-praise. Quintilian notes this briefly in his discussion on boastfulness, saying in regards to arrogance, “Cicero was blamed not a little in this area.”³⁴ Cicero acknowledges this himself after his return from exile, “And since you blame this, that you say that I speak about myself too boastfully, who has ever heard me speak about myself unless compelled or out of necessity?”³⁵ Whether Cicero’s use of self-praise would have been considered excessive by his audience is an interesting question. There is no doubt from the passages above that Cicero’s self-praise was at least occasionally criticized, but it appears that most of this criticism came from his enemies. For the friendly or neutral listener, it is possible that the self-praise Cicero employs may have been well within the realm of accepted behavior. Allen argues that Cicero would not have engaged in excessive self-praise saying, “It must be taken as a basic principle, however, that in the autobiographical remarks in all his works Cicero

³² Quint. *Inst. Or.* 11.1.16: *At qui se supra modum extollit, premere ac despicere creditur nec tam se maiorem quam minores ceteros facere.*

³³ Cic. *De Orat.* 1.119: *Mihi etiam, quique optime dicunt, qui id facillime atque ornatissime facere possunt, tamen, nisi timide ad dicendum accedunt, et in exordienda oratione perturbantur, paene impudentes videntur.*

³⁴ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 11.1.17: *Reprehensus est in hac parte non mediocriter Cicero.*

³⁵ Cic. *De Domo Sua* 93: *et quoniam hoc reprehendis, quod solere me dicas de me ipso gloriosius praedicare, quis umquam audivit cum ego de me nisi coactus ac necessario dicerem?*

did not intend to be offensive and that he did wish to conform to the usual standard of manners.”³⁶ Allen concludes that Cicero’s self-praise was not only acceptable, but that it was appropriate to his situation in every way: “Instead he did what was possible for the occasional new man who was elected to high magistracy, he praised his own industry and merits; and Cicero added the special circumstance that he had been elected to the consulship at the earliest legal age and without repulse, and in a sweeping victory.”³⁷ Allen likewise holds that Cicero’s habit of self-praise was in good company, noting that he knows of no evidence suggesting Cicero was more vain than any of his peers.

Kaster reaches a similar conclusion about Cicero’s self-praise, though with a different explanation. Kaster views praise in the Roman Republic as a commodity; since Cicero had received praise for his actions, he was entitled to use that praise to his benefit: “In this economy, praise is a commodity, a thing of value traded back and forth...and the recipient is free to use it as suits his needs.”³⁸ Since Cicero limits the self-praise that appears most vain to those statements in which he can simply report the good things others have said about him, these boldest praises would not have fallen outside the limit of acceptable self-praise because they would not have been considered self-praise at all.³⁹ Kaster concludes, much like Allen, that Cicero’s self-praise was not only acceptable, but expected. It would, Kaster asserts, be contrary to Roman expectations to not share glory that one has attained, and that by sharing the praise he has received, Cicero does no more than what he is entitled to do.⁴⁰

Despite the likelihood that Cicero’s self-praise fell into socially accepted boundaries, it was critical for Cicero to maintain it within those limits and, to the extent possible, to discredit

³⁶ Allen 1954:122.

³⁷ Allen 1954:132.

³⁸ Kaster 2005:8.

³⁹ Kaster 2005:6.

⁴⁰ Kaster 2005:7.

those that criticized his self-praise as being excessive. Batstone considers the mixed use of blame and praise in the prosopopoeia of the *Patria* as one means of avoiding any hatred that could come with excessive praise, saying that the language of the *Patria* “mixes praise and blame in an elegant balance, which serves to erase any real *invidia* for Cicero's self-praise with an expression of gratitude for his success joined with an acknowledgment of his responsibilities.”⁴¹

Self-blame is a concept that is less discussed in the rhetorical texts than self-praise. Aristotle speaks on a related issue in his discussion on metaphor when he indicates that to avoid accusations of excess in using figures of speech, the speaker should use self-criticism to excuse the excessive metaphor. This blame can make the metaphor appear more truthful to the audience. “But the remedy for all excess is this common thing; it is necessary for the speaker to blame himself besides, for it seems to be the truth, since he does not conceal what he is doing.”⁴² In addition, this self-blame has the benefit of preventing the same blame from coming from others. Aristotle’s recommendation to use self-blame to excuse a speaker’s excessive use of metaphor provides a parallel for Cicero’s use of self-blame to avoid the criticism of excessive self-praise and to make the actions he intends to take against Catiline seem appropriate and even necessary, actions that some of his listeners would later consider to be outside the limits of his powers. In addition, Cicero uses self-blame to preempt blame that could come from others, allowing him to immediately provide a justification for the potentially blameworthy actions. In addition, he uses

⁴¹ Batstone 1994:255.

⁴² Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1408b: ἄκος δ' ἐπὶ πάσῃ ὑπερβολῇ τὸ θρυλούμενον: δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν αὐτῷ προσεπιπλήττειν: δοκεῖ γὰρ ἀληθὲς εἶναι, ἐπεὶ οὐ λανθάνει γε ὁ ποιεῖ τὸν λέγοντα.

self-blame as a way to show, indirectly, the actions against Catiline that he would consider to be most advisable.⁴³

Modern scholarship, like ancient texts, has not given much consideration to Cicero's self-blame in the *First Catilinarian*. Dyck's recent commentary on the *First Catilinarian* dismisses the significance of the first passage of self-blame in 1.3 saying only that "The self-accusation is, however, merely put forward to clear the way for a defense of his procedure."⁴⁴ Dyck characterizes the self-blame at 1.5 in a similar way, referencing Batstone's determination that this self-blame was a temporary state which Cicero will later "reconceive...as prudential wisdom."⁴⁵ While both these statements about Cicero's self-blame in the early part of the *First Catilinarian* are certainly true, they present an overly simplistic view of Cicero's use of self-blame in this speech. The indirect self-blame in the prosopopoeia is not considered at all. Batstone considers Cicero's self-blame to a similar extent. Self-blame is seen as a device set up solely to be later refuted.⁴⁶

SELF-BLAME AS A RHETORICAL DEVICE

Cicero's first two instances of self-blame in the *First Catilinarian*⁴⁷ come after lists of comparisons that Cicero draws between the situation in the Catilinarian conspiracy and the actions of historical figures towards their respective crises.⁴⁸ The first passage, "We, the consuls, I say openly, we have failed"⁴⁹ follows a description of the actions of Publius Scipio and Gaius Servilius Ahala.⁵⁰ The second "I desire, senators, to be merciful, I desire in such danger of the

⁴³ *Rhet. ad Her.* 3.11.

⁴⁴ Dyck 2008:71.

⁴⁵ Dyck 2008:74.

⁴⁶ Batstone 1994:227-228.

⁴⁷ *Cic. Cat.* 1.3-4.

⁴⁸ *Cic. Cat.* 1.3-4.

⁴⁹ *Cic. Cat.* 1.3: *nos, nos, dico aperte, consules desumus.*

⁵⁰ *Cic. Cat.* 1.3.

republic not to seem negligent, but now I condemn myself for inactivity and idleness”⁵¹ comes after a description of the actions of Lucius Opimius, Gaius Marius and Lucius Valerius after a similar senate decree.⁵² This type of comparison is identified by Quintilian as a figure useful for amplification or emphasis; in fact, Quintilian identifies part of the comparison passage in the *First Catilinarian* specifically as an example of this figure.⁵³ “Here Catiline is compared to Gracchus and the situation of the republic to the entire world and a change for the worse in the republic to death and fire and devastation and a private person is compared to the consuls: if anyone wished to expand on this theme, they would have great opportunity.”⁵⁴ This use of self-blame following such comparisons softens any accusation of excess that could follow from Cicero’s repeated use of this figure and his drawing such a broad comparison between himself and the historical figures he mentions. While he does not make a direct apology for the comparisons he draws, the blame Cicero directs at himself for failing to take the action he considers to be ideal against Catiline moderates the force of the comparison.

These passages of self-blame serve a second purpose in avoiding potential accusations of excess in Cicero’s comparison of himself to historical figures. This purpose is to frame the actions Cicero intends to take against Catiline as necessary and almost inevitable, instead of actions that could far exceed the limits of Cicero’s power. Cicero was aware of the opposition that his actions would draw, and he touches on these using the voice of the *Patria*, noting the problem of executing a citizen, and the possible hatred of posterity.⁵⁵ “What stops you?...The laws which have been passed about the punishment of Roman citizens?...Or do you fear the

⁵¹ Cic. *Cat.* 1.4: *cupio, patres conscripti, me esse clementem, cupio in tantis rei publicae periculis non dissolutum videri, sed iam me ipse inertiae nequitiaeque condemno.*

⁵² Cic. *Cat.* 1.4.

⁵³ Quint. *Inst.Or.* 8.4.13-14.

⁵⁴ Quint. *Inst.Or.* 8.4.14.

⁵⁵ Cic. *Cat.* 1.28.

hatred of the ages?”⁵⁶ This use for self-blame is explained in the second portion of Aristotle’s statement on self-criticism, “for it seems to be the truth, since he does not conceal what he is doing.”⁵⁷ Cicero’s self-blame, then, mitigates the potentially excessive nature of the actions he wishes to take. By using self-blame to highlight these actions, he adds an aura of appropriateness to them. Cicero touches on the problems that his desired actions against Catiline pose; using the voice of the *Patria* he presents the concerns that will later lead to his exile: the problem of executing a citizen, and the hatred of posterity⁵⁸. The use of blame against an inappropriate action as a way to highlight the opposite appropriate action is one of the three main uses of blame in rhetoric, and Cicero makes use of self-blame in these passages to demonstrate the approach to the Catilinarian conspiracy that he thinks is most appropriate for him to take in a less direct way.

Quintilian also discusses self-blame, though he takes a much different approach from Aristotle. Quintilian, in an extended discussion of boastfulness and self-praise, states that “the most pretentious kind of self-praise is actually scorn.”⁵⁹ While this passage does not specifically mention any examples, the theme throughout the discussion of self-praise in this section is Cicero and his use of self-praise. The context would indicate, then, that this passage is referencing Cicero’s occasional use of self-blame and interpreting it as a false and pretentious modesty instead of actual humility. This seems to support the concept that Cicero’s self-blame in the *First Catilinarian* is not representative of any actual blame Cicero wishes to place on himself, but rather that self-blame serves a useful task in the speech. Quintilian rarely criticizes

⁵⁶ Cic. *Cat.* 1.27-28.

⁵⁷ Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1408b.

⁵⁸ Cic. *Cat.* 1.28.

⁵⁹ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 11.1.22: *ambitosissimum gloriandi genus est etiam deridere.*

Cicero's rhetoric, so it is particularly notable that Cicero chooses to use a technique that rhetorical writers seem to disapprove of.

Cicero's self-blame bears a striking resemblance in both form and content to a sample figure of thought described in the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. In his section on frankness of speech, the author describes figures of thought of importance to orators. The passage on frank speech is particularly relevant because the author describes it as being used in those situations in which the orator is speaking before someone to whom he owes respect, in Cicero's case the Senate, and wants to reprimand one of them, in Cicero's case Catiline. The author gives two sample arguments demonstrating boldness of speech used to reprimand a jury. The second example has remarkable similarities to the second and third passages of self-blame in Cicero's *First Catilinarian*.

Now what was the reason, judges, that you hesitated to pass a sentence or that you glorified this wicked man? Were not the facts of the charge given most clearly? Was not the answer in reply weak and trifling? Did you fear that, if you had condemned him at the first meeting, that you would be considered cruel? While you evade this blame, which would have been far from you, you have incurred this other one, that you are considered to be lazy and timid.⁶⁰

Cicero follows the general theme of this passage in his second passage of self-blame stating "I desire, senators, to be merciful, I desire in such danger of the republic not to seem negligent, but

⁶⁰ *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.48: *Nam quid fuit, iudices, quare in sententiis ferendis dubitaveritis aut istum hominem nefarium ampliaveritis? Non apertissimae res erant crimini datae? Non contra tenuiter et nugatorie responsum? Hic vos veriti estis, si primo coetu condemnassetis, ne crudeles existimaremini? Dum eam vitatis vituperationem, quae longe a vobis erat afutura, eam invenistis, ut timidi atque ignavi putaremini.*

now I condemn myself for inactivity and idleness.”⁶¹ The theme of these two passages is the same, though one criticizes the actions of a jury and the other is self-criticism. In both passages, the problem is presented of avoiding the accusation of cruelty without being hesitant or overly lenient. If, as Kennedy proposes, the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* studied under the same teacher as Cicero, this similarity is not surprising.⁶²

The similarities are also present in Cicero’s third use of self-criticism, placed in the voice of the *Patria*. “Or do you fear the hatred of posterity?”⁶³ ...But if you have any fear of hatred, is not the hatred of excessive severity and fortitude more to be feared than hatred from laziness and negligence?”⁶⁴ This passage again draws the comparison between a fear of being overly severe and the accusation of laziness or negligence.

It would appear from the passage in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* that it was not an uncommon rhetorical strategy to accuse a jury of being remiss in its duties because of a fear of being considered too harsh. Cicero uses this tactic in a self-critical fashion in the *First Catilinarian* to avoid a similar accusation being leveled against him, that in not immediately killing Catiline or ordering him into exile he was negligent in his duties as a consul.

SELF BLAME AS A JUSTIFICATION

In addition to capitalizing on the rhetorical strategy for accusing a jury put forth in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s passages of direct self-criticism can be seen as forming an argument that will eventually turn to justifying the very behavior that Cicero appears to criticize. To do this, Cicero takes on the roles of both a prosecutor and a defender in a speech.

⁶¹ Cic. *Cat.* 1.4: *cupio, patres conscripti, me esse clementem, cupio in tantis rei publicae periculis non dissolutum videri, sed iam me ipse inertiae nequitiaeque condemno.*

⁶² Kennedy 1994:121.

⁶³ Cic. *Cat.* 1.28: *an invidiam posteritatis times?*

⁶⁴ Cic. *Cat.* 1.29: *sed si quis est invidiae metus, non est vehementius severitatis ac fortitudinis invidia quam inertiae ac nequitiae pertimescenda?*

Cicero begins the argument by acting as the prosecutor, using self-criticism to state a potentially blameworthy lack of action on his part.⁶⁵ As a prosecutor, he then uses historical examples to establish precedent for the blameworthiness of Cicero's inaction,⁶⁶ and finally turns to a brief discussion of the legal principles that would defend the actions that he has failed to take to this point.⁶⁷ Cicero then restates the fact of the "prosecution" argument; that he has failed in his role due to inactivity. Following this accusation, Cicero now turns to speak in his own defense. The options generally available for the defense when the accusation is related to the actual case are either to deny that the actions occurred entirely or to justify them as appropriate: "If it is this former case, one must deny it, or support it, or avert it, for there is essentially nothing else in judicial speeches outside of these."⁶⁸ Cicero, as it is necessary for his argument, justifies the facts he has given. Cicero begins his defense with a brief narrative of the situation,⁶⁹ and then finally justifies the hesitant response that he as the prosecutor criticized, as he addresses Catiline:

Indeed this thing that I should have done some time ago, for a certain reason I have not yet been inclined to do. Then finally you will be killed, when it is not possible to find someone so wicked, so degenerate, so like you who does not confess that it was done justly.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Cic. *Cat.* 1.3.

⁶⁶ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 12.4.2.

⁶⁷ Cic. *Cat.* 1.4.

⁶⁸ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 5.13.4: *nam si est proprium, aut negandum aut defendendum aut transferendum; extra haec in iudiciis fere nihil est.* see also Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1417b, *ad Alexandrum* 1443a.

⁶⁹ Cic. *Cat.* 1.5.

⁷⁰ Cic. *Cat.* 1.5: *verum ego hoc quod iam pridem factum esse oportuit certa de causa nondum adducor ut faciam. tum denique interficere, cum iam nemo tam improbus, tam perditus, tam tui similis inveniri poterit qui id non iure factum esse fateatur.*

Thus by the end of his “defense,” Cicero has taken what appeared to be a valid point of criticism against him at the beginning and has turned it into justified, defensible, and even commendable action.

PROSOPOPOEIA

Prosopopoeia, most generally, is a figure in which the speaker uses impersonation to deliver his message through the voice of another. Many other terms are used for the figure of impersonation. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* uses the terms *sermocinatio*⁷¹ and *conformatio*⁷² to refer to the introduction of an impersonated character in a speech. Whether *sermocinatio* is properly considered to be the same as *prosopopoeia* is disputed, with some authors classifying *sermocinatio* as a portrayal of an imagined speech between two actual people and *prosopopoeia* as the construct of imagined speech between two imagined people.⁷³ Quintilian, however draws no such distinction, considering both types of impersonated speech to be equivalent and placing both under the term *prosopopoeia*.⁷⁴ Cicero himself does not use the term *prosopopoeia*, instead, he uses the term *personarum ficta inductio*⁷⁵ to refer to the same figure, and Quintilian, likewise, when referencing Cicero’s treatment of this figure, uses the term *fictiones personarum*.⁷⁶ In rhetoric, this device is considered to be a forceful one. Rutilius Lupus defines *prosopopoeia* as “when we personify inanimate objects, which are without personality, or we describe the action or speech of these men who are dead just as if it was of those living and present.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.55,65.

⁷² *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.66.

⁷³ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.31.

⁷⁴ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.31-32.

⁷⁵ Cic. *De Orat.* 3.205.

⁷⁶ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.29.

⁷⁷ Rutilius Lupus 2.6.

Prosopopoeia as a rhetorical figure has two primary strengths: the ability to raise emotion in the hearers and the ability to take liberties with lines of argument that might not otherwise be acceptable if used outside of the construct of *prosopopoeia*. Quintilian speaks positively of the use of *prosopopoeia* in oratory, noting that *prosopopoeia* benefits oratory in general by adding variety and excitement “for this is a thing which to a great extent varies a speech and excites it.”⁷⁸ Quintilian goes beyond these overall benefits and focuses his treatment of *prosopopoeia* on the emotional effect of impersonation on the hearers. He states that even when the facts are compelling by themselves, the use of *prosopopoeia* increases the emotional impact of the facts “but when we imagine that one to speak, the emotion is also drawn from his person.”⁷⁹ He also mentions that an appeal to pity through *prosopopoeia* can be even more effective than if the character being personified were actually present and issuing the appeal: “And as pitiable as it would be if they said it themselves, it is by a certain amount more powerful in making an influence when it is said as if it was from their own mouth.”⁸⁰

Quintilian goes even further in his discussion of *prosopopoeia* as an emotional appeal, using a simile, which is itself an emotional embellishment,⁸¹ to compare the emotional effects of *prosopopoeia* to a torrential river. This comparison is used to demonstrate the third style of speaking that Quintilian defines, a style that he describes as being flowery (*floridum*),⁸² the type of speaking that is most suited for amusing or pleasing the audience (*delectandi*)⁸³ or for winning them over (*conciliandi*)⁸⁴. Quintilian cites Cicero’s *prosopopoeiae* of Appius Caecus in

⁷⁸ Quint. *Inst. Or* 9.2.29: *mire namque cum variant orationem tum excitant.*

⁷⁹ Quint. *Inst. Or* 6.1.25: *at cum ipsos loqui fingimus, ex personis quoque trahitur adfectus.*

⁸⁰ Quint *Inst. Or* 6.1.26: *quantoque essent miserabiliora si ea dicerent ipsi, tanto sunt quadam portione ad adficiendum potentiora cum velut ipsorum ore dicuntur.*

⁸¹ *Rhet. ad Her* 4.45.59.

⁸² Quint. *Inst. Or* 12.10.58.

⁸³ Quint. *Inst. Or* 12.10.59.

⁸⁴ Quint. *Inst. Or* 12.10.59.

the *Pro Caelio* and of the *Patria* in the *First Catilinarian* as his examples of this style of speaking.

But he who rolls down rocks and “scorns the bridge” and makes banks for himself, he, a great torrent, will carry the judge along even though struggling against him and will force him to go where he carries him. This orator even will rouse the dead as Appius Caecus, in the presence of this one the *patria* itself will call out, and sometimes will speak to Cicero in the oration against Catiline in the senate.⁸⁵

The other use of *prosopopoeia* is to introduce certain information or lines of argumentation that, in more direct speech, might not otherwise be appropriate to the case or well received by the hearers, and to avoid losing credibility when introducing these statements. Aquila includes this use in his discussion of the uses of *prosopopoeia*, stating that the introduction of an historically authoritative imagined speaker allows the orator much greater freedom in using lines of argument that would not otherwise be tolerated. “For often, those things which the judges scarcely endure us speaking from our person, will be able to be said more freely and more fittingly with the substituted dignity of a character.”⁸⁶

Quintilian notes the wide range of topics that can be included in the *prosopopoeia* without the orator losing credibility: “And we can credibly introduce our discussions with others or of others among themselves, and we give to suitable people advice, reproach, complaint, praise, and pity.”⁸⁷ Cicero makes great use of *prosopopoeia* for reproach and complaint in the

⁸⁵ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 12.10.61: *at ille qui saxa devolvat et "pontem indignetur" et ripas sibi faciat multus et torrens iudicem vel nitentem contra feret, coetque ire qua rapiet. Hic orator et defunctos excitabit ut Appium Caecum, apud hunc et patria ipsa exclamabit, aliquandoque Ciceronem in oratione contra Catilinam in senatu adloquetur.*

⁸⁶ Aquila 3: *saepe enim, quae nos ex nostra persona dicentes vix ferant iudices, supposita dignitate personae liberius dici et convenientius poterunt.*

⁸⁷ Quint *Inst. Or.* 9.2.30: *et nostros cum aliis sermones et aliorum inter se credibiliter introducimus, et suadendo, obiurgando, querendo, laudando, miserando personas idoneas damus.*

First Catilinarian, both in his reproach of Catiline as the voice of the *Patria*, and in his portrayal of the *Patria* criticizing him.

THE PATRIA AS AN ANCESTOR

The use of *prosopopoeia* provided another way for Cicero to use self-blame to his advantage. Cicero's use of self-blame carried clear risks. As a *novus homo*, it was important for him, perhaps even more so than for other consuls, to present the appearance of competency in his handling of the conspiracy. The political climate at Rome was not kind to the *novus homo*; Sallust notes that prior to Cicero's consulship "many of the nobles were filled with jealousy and thought the consulship to be degraded in a way, if a new man, however extraordinary, attained it. But when danger came, jealousy and pride were put aside."⁸⁸ As Cicero has just begun to reveal the danger faced by the Republic in the *First Catilinarian*, he must remain aware of the hostile feelings held by many in the senate and take the necessary precautions in his use of self-blame to avoid the appearance of incompetence.

Cicero was clearly aware of the prejudice he faced as a *novus homo*. Seven years prior to his election as consul, he mentions these difficulties in his second speech against Verres. Cicero discusses his situation at length, beginning by stating "but the same thing is not allowed for me that is to those who were born into the nobility, on whom all the Roman people give honors even while sleeping; I must live under very different laws and conditions in this state."⁸⁹ Then, after describing other *novi homines*, he states in reference to them and to himself "There is hardly any member of the nobility who supports our activities; we are not able to win over their favor by any of our deeds; it is as if they were of a different nature and race, no different are they

⁸⁸ Sall. *Bell. Cat.* 23.6: *namque antea pleraque nobilitas invidia aestuabat et quasi pollui consulatum credebant, si eum quamvis egregius homo novus adeptus foret. Sed ubi periculum advenit, invidia atque superbia post fuere.*

⁸⁹ Cic. *In Verrem* 2.5.180: *sed non idem licet mihi quod iis qui nobili genere nati sunt, quibus omnia populi Romani beneficia dormientibus deferuntur; longe alia mihi lege in hac civitate et condicione vivendum est.*

from our spirit and purpose.”⁹⁰ The overall societal attitude towards the *novus homo* did not change dramatically after Cicero became consul, and the great danger Sallust refers to that would have allowed this prejudice to be set aside was not yet known by most of the Senate when the *First Catilinarian* was given. Cicero acknowledges this in his second speech as consul, “Indeed more than others of them no error of mine will be indulged, there is little praise in doing the right thing and that is given by unwilling people; if I doubt, I have no faithful counsel, if I am in distress, no sure help will be shown by the nobility.”⁹¹ It is imperative for Cicero’s continued political success that he not provide the nobility any further opportunity to criticize his status as a *novus homo*.

Cicero’s choice of the *Patria* as the speaker in the *prosopopoeia* in the *First Catilinarian* is a response to this problem. The invented speaker in *prosopopoeia* can take a wide variety of forms. Quintilian considers a wide range of speakers in his discussion of *prosopopoeia*: “In fact it is possible to bring down the gods in this type of speaking, and to raise the dead. Even the cities and nations take a voice.”⁹² Cicero, however, rarely uses *prosopopoeia* outside of the *First Catilinarian*. Two notable uses are in the *Pro Caelio*. In both of these, the speaker is a real individual, either deceased as with Appius Claudius Caecus, or alive as with the younger brother of Clodia. Prior to the *prosopopoeia* against Catiline in the *First Catilinarian*, Cicero draws a comparison between Catiline’s parents and the *Patria* and places the *Patria* in the position of a common ancestor: “If your parents feared and hated you, and you were not by any means able to appease them, I would think that you would go somewhere away from their eyes. Now your

⁹⁰ Cic. *In Verrem* 2.5.180: *hominum nobilium non fere quisquam nostrae industriae favet; nullis nostris officiis benivolentiam illorum adlicere possumus; quasi natura et genere diiuncti sint, ita dissident a nobis animo ac voluntate.*

⁹¹ Cic. *De Leg. Ag.* 2.5: *tum vero mihi praeter ceteros cuius errato nulla venia, recte facto exigua laus et ab invitis expressa proponitur; non dubitanti fidele consilium, non laboranti certum subsidium nobilitatis ostenditur.*

⁹² Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.31: *quin deducere deos in hoc genere dicendi et inferos excitare concessum est. Vrbes etiam populi que vocem accipiunt.*

homeland, which is the common parent of all of us, hates and fears you.”⁹³ As a result, the *Patria* functions against Catiline in a much similar way to how Claudius acts in the *Pro Caelio*, as a disapproving ancestor, though in this case one shared with the rest of the Roman people. Cicero harnesses this use of the *Patria* in the second *prosopopoeia* in the *First Catilinarian* in which the *Patria* brings an accusation of negligence against him.

The use of a respected virtue or concept to substitute for the lack of noble ancestors was not an uncommon technique for the *novus homo*. Wiseman compares this use of the created ancestor of the *novus homo* and the actual ancestors of the nobility saying

The aristocrat achieved office by *mos maiorum* and the recognition or assumption of inherited ability and experience. The corollary of this was that any success scored by a *novus* must be put down to the whim of Fortuna... . But in public, at least, it was more respectable to base one’s claim on virtue than on luck, and on an ability supposedly more obvious than that assumed by the *nobiles* and their imitators.⁹⁴

Cicero uses this concept in the *prosopopoeia* to present the *Patria* as his ancestor, but not generically as an ancestor of all Romans as he portrays her relation to Catiline, but as having a relationship with him that is more significant and more directly parental.

Cicero introduces the second *prosopopoeia* by establishing his personal connection to the *Patria*. “Even if my homeland, which is far dearer to me than my own life, if all Italy, if the whole republic were to say this.”⁹⁵ Then, in the middle of the passage, Cicero establishes the reason for his indebtedness to the *Patria* through the voice of the *Patria*: ““Indeed you give great thanks to the Roman people who raised you through all the positions of honor to the highest

⁹³ Cic. *Cat.* 1.17.

⁹⁴ Wiseman 1971:109.

⁹⁵ Cic. *Cat.* 1. 27.

power, a man known only through himself, and with no recommendation from ancestors.”⁹⁶

Cicero makes clear in this passage that he intends the *Patria* to be understood as his distinguished ancestor, a force that has taken a personal interest in Cicero’s success.

The use of the *Patria* as the speaker in the *prosopopoeia* provides an additional benefit for Cicero besides substituting as a worthy ancestor. The assumption of the voice of the *Patria* also allows Cicero to engage in self-blame without compromising his dignity as the consul or appearing ineffective in his handling of the conspiracy. Aquila references *prosopopoeia* as a technique that allows the speaker to assume the dignity of another and thus to speak more freely,⁹⁷ and Cicero does exactly that. His self-blame, placed in the mouth of the *Patria*, carries with it the dignity and weight of the *Patria*. While it would have been a slight to Cicero’s carefully constructed authority as a *novus homo* if a member of the Senate had brought up these criticisms, the possibility of such a confrontation occurring is removed by Cicero addressing these likely criticisms himself, and the affront to his status as consul is minimized by using the *Patria*, a figure that exceeds any human, as the speaker. In the same vein, Quintilian also mentions that *prosopopoeia* can be used to discuss issues of blame and reproach while maintaining the speaker’s credibility.⁹⁸ Cicero takes advantage of the power of this construction to reinforce his credibility while avoiding the potential harm of allowing such questions to be asked by the Senate. As a result, the *Patria* is established as the only worthy critic of Cicero’s actions, and Cicero can then address the complaints raised through the voice of the *Patria* and dismiss them. He acknowledges in his response that the complaints of the *Patria* are likely shared by at least some of his audience: “I will respond briefly to these most holy words of the

⁹⁶ Cic. *Cat.* 1.28.

⁹⁷ Aquila 3.

⁹⁸ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.29.

republic and of those men who have the same feeling.”⁹⁹ Cicero ends his defense against the accusations of the *Patria* by reestablishing his role as the consul and assuring his audience that everything he has asserted is correct and will become readily apparent: “I promise you this, Senators, there will be such diligence in the consuls, such authority in yourselves, such virtue in the Roman knights, such agreement among all good men that you will see everything made clear, brought to light, overwhelmed, and destroyed by the departure of Catiline.”¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

Cicero’s use of self-blame in the *First Catilinarian* is a novel, risky, and yet ultimately beneficial rhetorical strategy. Cicero, aware of the criticisms already existing against him because of the perception that his use of self-praise was excessive and because of his status as a *novus homo*, is able to shape self-blame, a rarely discussed rhetorical construct, into a useful method for framing self-praise while avoiding arrogance and warding off potentially damaging criticism. Cicero carefully positions each instance of self-blame in a way that ensures that the action or inaction being criticized will immediately be justified by the argument that follows. In this way, Cicero supports his lack of immediate action against the Catilinarian conspiracy without appearing to praise his behavior outright. In the same way, the justification that follows each instance of self-blame allows Cicero to avoid any damage to his status as consul by diminishing the force of the self-blame and ensuring that likely questions about his handling of the conspiracy are answered before anyone can ask them. Cicero uses the self-blame in the *prosopopoeia* of the *Patria* in a similar way, but with the added benefit of being able to present the *Patria* as a parental figure personally interested in Cicero’s successful handling of the

⁹⁹ Cic. *Cat.* 1.29: *his ego sanctissimis rei publicae vocibus et eorum hominum qui hoc idem sentiunt mentibus pauca respondebo.*

¹⁰⁰ Cic. *Cat.* 1.32: *polliceor hoc vobis, patres conscripti, tantam in nobis consulibus fore diligentiam, tantam in vobis auctoritatem, tantam in equitibus Romanis virtutem, tantam in omnibus bonis consensionem ut Catilinae profectione omnia patefacta, inlustrata, oppressa, vindicata esse videatis.*

conspiracy. This use of a substituted ancestor permits Cicero to acquire the benefits of self-blame without damaging his status; in fact, the establishment of the *Patria* as an ancestor may even elevate his status.

It is not entirely surprising that self-blame was largely overlooked in ancient rhetorical texts. Self-blame, as it is used in the *First Catilinarian*, is not well suited to the standard types of oratory. For the forensic or epideictic orator, whose primary topic is the actions or character of another person, it would be an unusual strategy to direct blame towards one's self. Likewise, the deliberative orator would find no clear benefit in introducing self-criticism into a discussion. Few situations would have arisen in the course of an orator's career where self-blame would have been a useful rhetorical strategy. In those rare situations where self-blame might have been considered for use in a speech, it does not seem to be recommended, as I have discussed above in Quintilian's brief comment on its usage.¹⁰¹ The *First Catilinarian* and its non-traditional structure provides a unique situation where self-blame is not only acceptable, but useful and apparently successful. Cicero is able to take self-blame and use it to create an initial image of himself as a troubled *novus homo* struggling to manage a crisis, then redirects the self-blame into praise and presents himself as far exceeding the character of the *novus homo* he initially created. Self-blame allows Cicero another method of manipulating the ideal image of himself he hopes to project throughout the *First Catilinarian*.

¹⁰¹ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 11.1.22.

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